

VZCZCXRO1346

RR RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR

DE RUEHVJ #1454/01 2560826

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

R 120826Z SEP 08

FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8925

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUEKJCS/JCS WASHINGTON DC

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0261

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

RUZEJAA/USNIC SARAJEVO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 001454

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2018

TAGS: PREL BK RS

SUBJECT: BOSNIA--ABKHAZIA, SOUTH OSSETIA, RUSSIA AND  
REPUBLIKA SRPSKA'S FUTURE IN BOSNIA

REF: A. REF A: 2007 SARAJEVO 1738

1B. REF B: SARAJEVO 1114

1C. REF C: SARAJEVO 816

1D. REF D: MOSCOW 663

1E. REF E: 07 US NATO 630

Classified By: Amb. Charles English for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: A resurgent Russia and the crisis in Georgia are casting a shadow on politics in Bosnia. In the latest manifestation of Russia's increasingly unhelpful role here, the Russian Ambassador exploited a foreign policy vacuum at the state level to give Republika Srpska (RS) leaders the opportunity to repeat Russian talking points on Abkhazia and South Ossetia and, by implication, underscore a potential alternative path for RS outside Bosnia and Herzegovina. For months, the Russians have engaged in behavior that has undermined our objectives in Bosnia (e.g., footnoting the PIC communique in February 2007, opposing the Srebrenica election amendment deal, and more recently, walking out of the June PIC). Key local actors believe that Russian backing has emboldened RS PM Dodik, who has been engaged in a long campaign to undermine the Bosnian state. To what extent Russia is prepared to take its political sponsorship of RS remains to be seen, but the possibility is there that the RS could become the next political playground for Russia's reemergence as an obstructionist counterweight to our policy goals. END SUMMARY

Bosnia's State-Level Foreign Policy Vacuum

12. (C) Bosnia and Herzegovina remains institutionally incapable to respond, as a state, to the crisis in Georgia (among many other things). As we saw during the UNGA debate on the ICJ referral on Kosovo, Bosnia's own ethnic divisions scotch any chance of compromise at the state level on questions of territorial integrity vs. self determination. This creates a foreign policy vacuum, which in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the RS has exploited to act like a state, expressing justification for Russia's invasion of Georgia in August, and stating positions on the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Russia Exploits the Vacuum

13. (C) As the crisis unfolded in Georgia, Republika Srpska-based media revived year-old, spurious reports about arms deals between Bosnia and Georgia (Ref A). Russian ambassador to Bosnia Konstantin Shuvalov lost no time making rounds of public appearances with RS politicians and Bosnian Serb leaders within the Bosnian government, ostensibly to denounce the non-existing weapons exports to Georgia. RS

President Rajko Kuzmanovic and PM Milorad Dodik ludicrously claimed to have "convinced the Ambassador that RS officials have not and will not give their approval for any sale." (Note: As an entity government, the RS has no legal competence to approve the export of arms. All relevant state institutions agree that Bosnia has not exported any weapons to Georgia since 2005. End Note.)

RS Implies Linkage to S. Ossetia, Abkhazia

---

14. (C) Republika Srbska PM Dodik, speaking after his meeting with the Russian Ambassador, said "There is an essential link between Kosovo and these two regions. Many regions will now follow the example of how it was in Georgia." While paying lip service to his "commitment to Dayton," Dodik in the same statement again mentioned the possibility of "radical moves like a declaration of independence" for the RS. For his part, the Russian ambassador stated that OHR's mandate is "fulfilled long ago", and that "Dayton must not be criticized." Then Kuzmanovic used the occasion to deliver Russian talking points on Georgia, adding that the cases of Kosovo and South Ossetia are "more the rule now, than the exception." The implication for the RS was clear.

Russia Grows Increasingly Unhelpful

---

15. (C) Russia's diplomacy has grown increasingly unhelpful in Bosnia over the last several months:

SARAJEVO 00001454 002 OF 002

--In June, Russia refused to sign the PIC communique reiterating the conditions (to which they had agreed in February) for closing the Office of the High Representative (OHR), insisting instead on a date certain for closure, and they ultimately walked out of the proceedings (Ref B).

--In May, the Russian Ambassador took an obstructionist position, almost certainly under instruction, on the U.S.-brokered Srebrenica deal, which even RS PM Dodik supported (Ref C).

--In February, Medvedev briefly met Dodik (in Belgrade), after which the latter professed to "no longer believe in Bosnia" (Ref D).

--In February 2007, Russia insisted on attaching a footnote to the PIC communique registering its disagreement with the agreement to continue OHR's mandate in Bosnia.

--Last year, Russia fiercely lobbied against Lajcak's use of the Bonn powers (Ref E).

--Russia recognized the contribution of RS war veterans to the "Homeland Defense War," as many Serbs refer to the 1992-1995 war, by presenting the RS Veterans Association with the Order of Dimitri Dunska.

Comment:

---

16. (C) All these facts underscore Russia's transformation from partner to problem in Bosnia. While it's not clear how far Russia intends to go with its sponsorship of RS, Bosnian and Croat leaders believe Russian actions embolden Dodik in his efforts to consolidate the authority of RS as an autonomous actor and to undermine the state of Bosnia. Now that Russia has seemingly switched sides on the territorial integrity question, the post-Kosovo separatist rhetoric will find an easy audience among politicians and the public of Republika Srpska, and Russia can help Dodik's drive to weaken the state more than ever simply by standing behind him. This trend suggests a very difficult PIC in November, where we

expect Russia will push hard to close OHR even though the government will not have met all of the five objectives and two conditions for its closure.

ENGLISH